

CHRISTMAS BELLS.



THE OLD AND NEW.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

"Here, Nora, throw these branches out on the street, we must not litter the room," and Mrs. Loring handed Nora, her upper servant and faithful friend, two small branches which had been cut off the great Sunday-school Christmas tree which they were trimming.

Nora was a kind and loving soul, and when Mrs. Loring handed her the branches of pine she ran down the stairs and out on the sidewalk, thinking that it was a pity to throw those beautiful branches away.

A ragged, dirty girl was standing at the chapel door, looking curiously in; she had a hardened, wicked look, and when Nora appeared in her pretty, dark dress and apron trimmed with rick-rack, the girl made a face at her. But Nora saw below the dirt and ugliness, below the hard crust of hateful rebellion, into the heart which God loved and for which Christ died.

"Would you like these branches for a Christmas tree?" she said. "Here is a quarter to buy something to trim them with." It was her last quarter till after Christmas, but Nora did not mind that then.

The girl's face hardly changed; she did not hold out her hands for the greens, but seized the quarter wolfishly and Nora sighed as she ran back.

Nance looked at the quarter hungrily, turning it over to be sure "it wasn't filled in," and then stooped and picked up the branches which Nora had dropped.

"Dick shall have 'em and the money too," she muttered, "but I must be flyin' round, or Sal 'ull beat me again to-night. Christmas! If they'd ha' let me into that church last Sunday, I might ha' found out for Dick what it's all about, but the gal said as how no new ones would be 'lowed till next Sunday, and then it'll be over! Well, I'll hide these and be off!"

The girl ran up an alley and shoved her branches behind a barrel, which was frozen fast in a corner, and then she hurried off to the junction of Broadway and Fifth avenue, where she begged from passers-by. It was a lucky day for Nance; people are inclined to be liberal just before Christmas, and ladies with their arms full of bundles dropped pennies into her hand, some of them with a thought of what their own girls might be but for God's goodness, some merely to relieve their purses of cumbersome coppers. None really cared for the girl, for she was not by any means attractive. None? Yes; one woman did care.

Late in the afternoon, as Nance was rattling her pennies and thinking she might treat herself to a stale bun and a cup of coffee, she saw a lady coming toward her with a little boy on each side. Nance was shrewd enough never to let a woman with a child go by, for she had learned that, from some cause or another, such an one seldom refused her a copper.

"Please, ma'am!" she whined as the lady and her boys passed. The oldest boy pressed his mother's arm and looked up in her face.

"May I give her my ten cents?" he asked.

The mother looked at the hardened, dirty face and "No" rose to her lips, but some God-given impulse changed it to "Yes," and she added, "You two boys may run on to the shop window while I speak to the girl."

Rob handed Nance his dime and then Mrs. Haring said gently:

"Couldn't you earn a living instead of begging? I'd buy you a broom if you would sweep a crossing. Then,



EVERETT COLLECTION

after a while, you might get something to sell. Would you like to try?"

"Taint no good," muttered Nance. Mrs. Haring stopped in her earnestness and said: "My dear girl, it's worth trying! Either you can grow up a good, true woman, as God wants you to, or you can go on begging and perhaps—before you know it—stealing. Come to my house for your Christmas dinner—here is my number—and I hope you will be able to tell me you are earning, not begging, a living. Shall I buy the broom?"

"Please, ma'am," said Nance very humbly, and with a strange stirring at her poor heart. So they joined the boys and Mr. Haring chose out a good, stout broom for Nance. Rob was greatly interested in the whole matter, and whispered to Nance that the pudding was just splendid and mamma would give her lots of turkey.

It was too late to begin business that day, so, with her broom in one hand and the branches of pine in the other, Nance went back to the wretched place where she lived with a woman



DOWN THE CHIMNEY.

weak hands gave up trying to lift the boughs, which seemed but a feather's weight to Nance.

"Why, Dick!" the girl exclaimed joyously, "here's your flower-pot—it'll be just the thing! The dirt's in it yet—I'll wet it up a bit and plant 'em—shouldn't wonder if they'd grow!"

Dick's eyes lit with hope and eagerly he watched as the girl stuck the branches in, tying them together and making quite a pretty little tree of them.

"Now, to-morrow night I'll put the

mother's step—would it be firm and soft, or heavy and tottering?"

An hour after, she came up the stairs; she had kept away from the corner store and was more like herself than she had been for a long time. More like herself, but, just for that reason, more utterly wretched and discouraged than we, who have never been enslaved by drink, can guess.

"Is that you, mother?" asked Dick in the dark. "Oh, won't you light the lamp, so I can see my Christmas tree? What does Christmas mean, anyway? I asked Nance, but she couldn't tell."

Mary Wall's heart smote her that her boy should ask such a question. "Why it means—it means—well, it's Christ's birthday. He was born on Christmas day."

"Christ! Is He the 'Jesus' that you talk about when—when—"

The woman flushed: "Yes, He is Jesus Christ—He is God, and He came on earth as a little baby."

"I suppose He was rich and grand even when he was a baby," asked Dick



FORGOTTEN BY SANTA CLAUS.

pray to him."

The poor mother fell on her knees, sobbing bitterly, but angels rejoiced at her tears, for she, too, prayed at last—"God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Dick felt very tired after this and enjoyed his mother's gentle care of him and the cup of tea and bit of toast she prepared so lovingly. Then he fell asleep and dreamed pleasant dreams till the morning broke.

Nance was very fortunate the next day, for it was "slushy," and no one claimed the crossing she chose. She worked hard and kept it thoroughly cleaned, so that one and another as they passed by felt that she had earned a penny and she had a great number by the end of the day. Tired, yet wonderfully happy, she dragged herself, cold and dirty, up to Dick's attic, but when she threw open the door she started back, thinking that she must have made a mistake. But there lay Dick!

"Come in," cried the boy, "come in! Mother's just gone out, but she'll be back. Oh, Nance, she knew about Christmas, and it's just lovely—Jesus Christ was born on Christmas and he loves us still, and mother and me, we're going to do just the best we know how, 'cause that pleases Him and you can talk to Him and ask Him whatever you want."

Nance stood still, amazed. The room had been thoroughly cleaned, even the flower-pot in which the greens stood was scrubbed.

"Well! It's splendid, anyhow!" she said at last, "and I've bought lots of things for your tree. See—hens o' candy and little candy chickens and dogs and a big elephant; and here's lots of pop-corn—all strung—the woman says I'm to hang that on the tree and—just look a-her!" and Nance lifted carefully out of its tissue wrapping, a little figure of an angel.

Dick gazed with happy eyes; then the two dressed the tree. I don't think any big tree ever gave more pleasure than that little one. In the midst of their fun, Mrs. Wall came in with a New Year's cake for Dick and such pleasant words for Nance that the girl hated to have to go away. Mary saw how she lingered, and said: "Why can't you stay here, Nance? You're welcome to half o' my bed, if you care to stay."

Care to! Nance was only too glad, and Mary did not have to give a hint as to clean face and hands, for the girl stepped out to the sink in the hall and splashed away vigorously for ten minutes, coming in with such a rosy face that Dick asked for a kiss at once.

But you want to hear of the dinner at Mrs. Haring's? Well, it was just wonderful to Nance. She had a nice place set for her in the kitchen, and Rob waited on her, loading her plate with turkey, cranberries, sweet and white potatoes, with side dishes of tomatoes, onions and beets; but, to Rob's dismay, Nance ate very sparingly of the turkey and potatoes—she knew she could tie them up in a paper, while the tomatoes couldn't be carried, so she ate them!

Rob ran to his mother and she, suspecting some reason for the girl's want of appetite, went to her and said:

"Eat all you want, Nance, and if you have anyone at home to feed, I'll put up a basketful."

Then Nance told of Dick and his mother, and an hour later, Rob, his mother and Nance were riding over to the alley, Nance and Rob taking great care of a basket filled with good things for Dick.



NO ONE TO LOVE ME



LIGHTING THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

named "Sal," who boarded several girls and boys, making them beg for her. But before she went to "Sal's" room, Nance climbed to the attic of the house next door, and going in without knocking, she flung the branches down on a bed in the corner, where lay a sick child.

"There, Dick, that's a Christmas! And I've a whole quarter to spend on stuff to put on it—pretty things! And I'm set up in business, Dick, and I'm a-goin' to be good—just think of it, Dick!"

The crippled boy was glad to see how pleased Nance was, and very glad of the pretty, green branches. Poor little fellow! It did not take much to make him glad.

"Have you got time to fix 'em up like a tree, Nance?" he asked. "I seen a tree once, when father was alive and before mother took to drink. It had bright balls on it and candles and candies. I'd like you to set these up. My! Ain't they heavy?" and the poor,

things on, Dick, and we'll have Christmas—we two! And then the next day I'm to go to dinner at the lady's and I'll try to bring you some of the pudding and turkey the little boy told me of."

Then Nance had to leave, while Dick waited in the gathering gloom for his



MERRY CHRISTMAS

curiously—he did so love a story.

"No, indeed," said his mother slowly. The Savior's wondrous love and condescension dawned upon her as she told the "old, old story." "No, indeed! He came as a poor child—He was born in a stable—"

"Why, that's worse than a garret," put in Dick.

"Yes, and then, when He grew up He went about doing good. But at last they nailed him to the cross—"

The child gave a long, shuddering sigh.

"But He came out of the grave, Dick, and went up into heaven, and there He is now."

"Don't He care for us, mother?" said Dick after a pause. "Don't He care for little lame boys like me? Do you think He remembers about Christmas and likes us to have a tree?"

"Yes, I do, Dick; I know He cares—shame on me that, I've not taught you better! He loves us and wants us to